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To help students understand prejudice, teachers in Verona, New York, planned a unit which incorporated the use of fiction, television, and film. Students were asked to select and read books in the general area of prejudice. A sample reading list of works under the headings of Negro, Jew, Italian, and Irish was provided. After writing extensive analyses of their books, the students were assigned to panels to discuss such questions as (1) "Are the people depicted inferior?" and (2) "What are the qualifications of inferiority?" Next, the films, "A Raisin in the Sun" and "No Hiding Place," were shown for their depiction of existing problems of the Negro. Finally, the TV show, "I Spy", was used to give the students an opportunity to react to a Negro appearing as a "normal unexceptionable human being," not as an object of prejudice. (The sample reading list for a unit on prejudice is included.) (SW)

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

An eloquent and elementary lesson in interracial friendship is portrayed in the movie-still from the paperback cover of Patch of Blue (Popular Library, 50¢).

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Understanding Prejudice

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by David Babcock

FICTION, TV AND FILM can be successfully used in developing a unit on prejudice. For the past two years we have been evolving an approach to prejudice through materials as diverse as TV's *I Spy* and Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*, Anne Frank's *Diary* and the film *Raisin in the Sun*. As is true in any other teaching situation, the trick is to involve students.

Three weeks before the classroom activities were scheduled, each student was told to select any work in the general area of prejudice. A sample reading list was provided listing books under the headings—Negro, Jewish, Italian, and Irish. (See next page.)

After each student had chosen a book he was assigned an extensive analysis of it. The student discussed theme, style, organization, plausibility, and significance. Only after these papers were corrected and discussed did I feel that each student had enough background to participate on one of four panels.

To insure well-rounded and intelligent discussions I structured these panels by putting a class leader on each of them and by dividing the other members up between active and inactive participants. To orient the discussions I provided each group with two questions and allowed them one day to discuss them.

The results were very rewarding. In fact, each panel had at least one thought-provoking statement to offer. The first group's questions —"Are the people depicted inferior?" and "What are the qualifications for inferiority?"—stirred up these comments: "None of the characters in the books seemed inferior, mainly because by reading about them you came to see them as human beings and not objects of fear." "Inferiority," they stated, "should be determined by attitude, or lack of it. It should not be determined by such arbitrary things currently used to sort people—race, religion, education; instead it should be determined by how well each person does his chosen job." The second panel discussed the questions "What is the author's world view or theme?" and "What is the responsibility of the individual and of government in racial matters?" Their statements of theme were varied. One of the panel members made the observation that, though the themes ranged from detached philosophy to anger, almost all of them made a plea for common sense and abandonment of stereotypes. After heated discussion the second question was summarized: "The government should provide a legal framework of equality and the rest is up to the individual."

The third panel was asked first to answer the question "Is the book propagandistic or artistic?" and then to answer the purposely loaded question "Ya—but wouldya wanta marry one?" The first question provoked little comment as everyone felt his book had artistic merit. The second question evoked a good deal of passion. "What business is it of yours? Love is the most personal of matters; Who we love and why is a matter of concern to just two people." The fourth panel discussed "Is the book constructive or destructive?" and "What is the cause of prejudice and what does the future hold?" All praised the constructive nature of the books, but hopes for the future were a bit cynical: "Prejudice is ignited by fear, fed by ignorance, and kept blazing by self-interest. This is inherent in man. The only hope for the future is that he will shift his prejudice to a better scapegoat—the lazy or incompetent of all races, colors, and creeds."

After four days of discussion the class was ready for a change of pace and so *A Raisin in the Sun* worked in perfectly. The class had little difficulty in identifying with the central conflict—a family breaking apart—and no one felt

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it could be dismissed as just another sermon on racial equality. In fact, the discussion leader managed to draw out very well that this apparently typical family was no more interested in crusades and marches than were most families.

The *East Side-West Side* drama "No Hiding Place" tied in perfectly with *A Raisin in the Sun*, as it starred Ruby Dee and dealt with the problem of Negro housing. It differed, however, in attacking the problem from another angle. The Negroes were wealthy and the drama centered in the home of their new white neighbors. Our discussion, of course, dealt with the theme of the drama—there is no hiding from yourself; if you're prejudiced you have to recognize it and deal with it or else you will take it with you no matter where you run.

Also, they noted that characterization, without the buffering of commercials, became superficial; so much so that, in fact, the program was a dramatic documentary on block busters. This moved into the *CBS Reports* documentary "Segregation: Northern Style." The class found Mike Wallace's report on a wealthy Negro family's attempt to find a suitable home interesting; one boy observed that the various snooping devices used to follow the famliy's activity heightened the documentary's sense of drama.

Of course, all three of these films allowed us a common base for discussing the negro problem. But I still wasn't satisfied. I felt that the problem of prejudice would continue to exist until we stopped discussing it as a problem. I felt I must give them the chance to react to the Negro not as an object of prejudice or fear, but as a normal unexceptionable human being. To accomplish this, I had them watch *I Spy*.

The show was a good one—"The Loser" (which later won an Emmy for film editing). Luckily it had absolutely nothing to do with race that week so we spent the entire class discussing the story line, the camera work, the clever writing. Just before the bell I asked them why no one had mentioned the fact that Bill Cosby was a Negro—obviously significant to our discussion. The answer was what I had hoped for: "It isn't necessary," they said. "*I Spy* is just a good show where one of the characters happens to be Negro instead of Italian, Polish, or Irish." I would say they had come a long way.

Paperbacks are usually available through local distributors. Check the Yellow Pages under "Paperback Distributors" or "Magazine Distributors."

SAMPLE READING LIST FOR PREJUDICE UNIT

Negro

Cry, The Beloved Country
Alan Paton (Scribner, $1.45)
Lawd Today
Richard Wright (Avon, 60¢)
Native Son
Richard Wright (Signet, 75¢)
Black Boy
Richard Wright (Signet, 75¢)
Eight Men
Richard Wright (Avon, 60¢)
Peaceable Lane
Keith Wheeler (Signet, 75¢)
Blues for Mr. Charlie
James Baldwin (Dell, 60¢)
To Kill a Mockingbird
Harper Lee (Popular Library, 60¢)
Go Tell It on the Mountain
James Baldwin (Signet, 60¢)
Invisible Man
Ralph Ellison (Signet, 95¢)
A Raisin in the Sun
Lorraine Hansberry (Signet, 60¢)

Jewish

The Wall
John Hersey (Pocket Bks., 75¢)
This is My God
Herman Wouk (Dell, 75¢)
Marjorie Morningstar
Herman Wouk, (Signet, 95¢)
The Deputy
Rolf Hochhuth (Dell, 95¢)
Exodus
Leon Uris (Bantam, 95¢)
The Diary of a Young Girl
Anne Frank (Pocket Bks., 50¢)
Franny and Zooey
J. D. Salinger, (Bantam, 75¢)

Italian

Rally Round the Flag, Boys!
Max Shulman (Bantam, 75¢)
Christ in Concrete
Pietro Di Donato (Popular Library, 50¢)

Irish

Studs Lonigan
James T. Farrell (Signet Classic, 95¢)
The Last Hurrah
Edwin O'Connor (Bantam, 75¢)
The Edge of Sadness
Edwin O'Connor (Bantam, 75¢)
A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
Betty Smith (Popular Library, 75¢)
Maggie-Now
Betty Smith (Perennial, 95¢)
Father and Son
James T. Farrell (Popular Library, 75¢)
The Cardinal
Henry Morton Robinson (Pocket Bks., 75¢)